

Forbearing One Another

One Another Duties

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Bible Text: Ephesians 4:1-3; Colossians 3:12-13
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Well, brethren, last Lord's Day at the Reformed Baptist Church of Louisville, Pastor Savastio in the first hour continued in his review of J. C. Ryle's classic entitled "Holiness," and parenthetically it occurred to me this week to exhort you to consider including a fresh reading of "Holiness" in your devotional format for the approaching year.

Now last Lord's Day's review was in the second chapter of Ryle's classic, the second chapter entitled, "Sanctification wherein the true nature of sanctification is set forth, followed by the visible marks or evidences of sanctification." Ryle asked, "What are the visible marks of a sanctified man? What may we expect to see in him?" Then Ryle answers these questions, he answers these questions in 10 ways, the first five in the negative, and the second five in the positive, and the last three of the positive provide a segue back into our consideration of the "one another" passages of the New Testament. I excerpt from the eighth of the 10 marks of a sanctified man. "Genuine sanctification," Ryle writes, "will show itself in an habitual desire to live up to the standard which Paul sets before the churches in his writings." And later in that section, and again I excerpt, "a large quantity of plain practical directions about the Christian's duty in every relation of life, and about our daily habits, temper and behavior to one another." And leaving his words, are found in the apostles' writings to the churches. And what Ryle is setting out is that our conformity to these directives, so much of which have to do with our daily habits, temper and behavior to one another, is a mark of the a sanctified man.

The ninth response that Ryle gives to the question, "What are the visible marks of a sanctified man?" Number 9 is this, "Genuine sanctification will show itself in habitual attention to the active graces which our Lord so beautifully exemplified and especially to the grace of love." And then he quotes John 13:34-35, and then concludes this particular mark of a sanctified man with these words, "The selfish Christian," over against what has just been written of deeds and actions and self-denial in our loving relationships to one another, "The selfish Christian, the selfish Christian professor who wraps himself up in his own conceit of superior knowledge and seems to care nothing whether others sink or swim, go to heaven or hell, so long as he walks to church in his Sunday best and is called a 'sound member' – such a man knows nothing of sanctification." Notwithstanding what he knows.

Then finally Ryle writes his tenth visible mark of a sanctified man, "Genuine sanctification, in the last place, will show itself in habitual attention to," what he calls, "the passive graces of Christianity. When I speak of passive graces, I mean those graces which are especially shown in submission to the will of God, and in bearing and forbearing towards one another." Passive graces which are exercised in the soul in response to how others act toward us, and passive grace that he features here is that which he calls bearing and forbearing towards one another. In the context, he's setting that out as a mark of a sanctified man and conversely, the truth that if we relate to one another in our differences with a hasty impatience, with a rash excising of one another, avoiding one another, we're not a sanctified man or woman.

Brethren, it is forbearance that is the present "one another" duty that we take up this morning. Now concerning this matter of forbearance and by way of illustration, I want to go back to an illustration that I used about two years ago and at that time it was illustrating the grace of longsuffering or patience. I use it now to illustrate the grace of forbearance because as we will see tonight, patience is the underlying grace of which forbearance is the expression.

During the years that our son rented a house in the Norfolk area, we had our marvelous pet, the gentle giant Jeb. Some of you will recall Jeb was mostly pit bull. He was a strong beast and Jeb would sometimes accompany us on a visit to Virginia Beach. My son and his wife had rented a spacious backyard and they had a young and highly energetic Weimaraner named Mosby. That tells you something of our pedigree: Jeb, Mosby. Jeb and Mosby had quite a time in that backyard. Mosby, the younger, would persistently nip at, chase after, endeavor to play with Jeb, the more mature and older dog, and this would seem, I'm not saying it did, but it would seem to go on for hours, the two running all over the yard, Jeb occasionally probably from frustration and exhaustion flopping down, Mosby continually biting at him, agitating him, Jeb getting up and running on some more. And I would wonder when it would be that Jeb would have enough. When would he put an end to the persistent playful harassment of the younger and energetic Mosby? Jeb, if you'll recall, had the strength to put an end to probably a lot of people's canines, certainly he could have put an end to Mosby. But Jeb just put up with it at length. Jeb would go, escape Mosby's pursuit, lay down in the grass determined to recover, and Mosby once again would continue his playful provocations but at that point Jeb had had enough, and by his bared fangs and his growl, he demonstrated to Mosby this was over. Jeb up to that point had shown what we might call a canine version of the grace that is now our concern, forbearance, putting up with the agitations, the aggravations of others. As Jeb put up with the younger, active, playful Mosby who chased him and bit at him and bothered him, for a long period Jeb would endure it when all the while he could have immediately put an end to it.

Brethren, it's something like that that we are called to when the Scriptures tell us to show forbearance with one another. There are 15 occurrences in the New Testament of the verb that is commonly, at least in the NAS, translated "forbearance." Translations among those in occurrences include the following: put up with; endure; bear; and showing

forbearance, and the two most relevant and instructive texts for us, and I now read them, number 1, Ephesians 4:1-3,

1 I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, entreat you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, 2 with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing forbearance to one another in love, 3 being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

Then the parallel text, Colossians 3:12-13,

12 So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; 13 bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you.

Our primary references will be within the passages read, Ephesians 4:2 specifically, and Colossians 3:13. I trust you have the outline and let me quickly move through the headings to describe the headings and where we are going. The first of the headings: the face of forbearance. Now literally the face is the front of the head with the features of eyes and nose and mouth and cheeks and chin, and our faces have their own distinctive proportions and contours and shape, our faces identify us. The face of forbearance is a heading that has the sense of the features of this grace; the shape, that is the meaning, what does forbearance look like and that is probably as far as we will get in this hour.

Secondly, the fundamentals of forbearance. What is a fundamental? A fundamental by definition is a constituent element of which something is composed. A fundamental has to do with basics. Our concern here are basics of which this grace is composed, basics or essentials related to, bound up with, supportive of forbearance and thereto Ephesians 4:2 identifies them "with patience." That's the basic constituent element of forbearance, "with patience, showing forbearance to one another," and a second basic, "in love." Simply put, you are forbearing with those whom you love. Forbearance is an index of love. My wife loves me and that is why she forbears the habit I have of going through the kitchen and seeing the cup of tea on the counter, seeing no one there and drinking it and either pouring it out, putting it in the sink. She puts up with that because she loves me.

The fundamentals of forbearance: patience and love. Now next week, God willing, we will look at another related grace in Colossians 3:13, forgiveness. Thirdly, the focus of forbearance. By definition, a focus comes to us literally from the world of light rays. Focus is that point at which those rays converge. Our consideration here is the point or points upon which forbearance converges. Focus is that upon which attention is concentrated. To elaborate, a focus is a kind of target at which something is aimed. Our consideration here is that upon which forbearance zeroes in upon those things in others to which our response should be forbearance.

And finally, the finale of forbearance. What is a finale? It's the close or the end of something usually used in connection with a musical performance. A finale is a kind of climax or consummation of something. What is the finale of forbearance? Where is it headed? What is its climax? It's the unity of the church. Ephesians 4:3 grammatically this is plain, "being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." That's the finale, the climax of forbearance. That's what it's all about. Why are we forbearing with one another? What is the aim of it? The aim is unity in the church.

Well, that is where we're going. We take up now with the face of forbearance. What does it look like? What are its features? We now consider the term going back to Ephesians 4:2, and it is precisely right to the letter and accent mark the same term found in Colossians 3:13. The term comes from another compound in the original consisting of two words: up, like up; and to hold, literally to hold up. The word means to bear up; to put up with; to tolerate not with gritted teeth but graciously; to endure. The sense of the verb in both texts, Ephesians 4, Colossians 3, the sense of the term is that a patient man, that's the underlying grace, the patient man holds up under, holds out against, puts up with others, in connection especially to what it is in others that provokes him, what it is in others that annoys him and irritates him, more especially not their high-handed sins but rather their weaknesses, their faults, what we call eccentricities. An eccentricity is something that's unusual, out of the norm. We consider it bizarre. All of us have those features. I'll identify some that my brother has identified by our time in Zambia living with me. Deborah has confirmed she lives with them too. We're talking about things that vex us and bother us and wear on our nerves, not so much the sins of others but those things that we consider strange and odd and idiosyncratic, and the sense here of showing forbearance, holding up under these things, the sense is rather than write others off, rather than being done with them, rather than avoiding them so as not to be around their habits, their odd personalities, their temperamental quirks, their odd and strange ways that irk and agitate us, rather than avoiding them and writing them off, we graciously tolerate them. And there's one good reason to tolerate them, it's the remembrance we have them too. Others are having to tolerate us.

To show forbearance is to restrain one's self from a reactive word or a reactive deed, an expression of frustration, anger or exasperation in the presence of someone who, in one way or the other, simply bugs you, in more common vernacular, gets on your nerves, gets under your skin, drives you up a wall. They aggravate. They disturb you. In the language of other renderings, J. B. Phillips, he translates here and it is the paraphrase but a paraphrase that is, in my own judgment, an accurate interpretation, "making allowances for one another." Well, that's what forbearance is, "making allowances for one another because you love one another." He connects forbearance with that constituent element of love. The NIV renders "bearing with one another in love." The Amplified, "bearing with one another and making allowances because you love one another." The Authorized and the old NASB, "forbearing one another in love." Two lesser known renderings, "lovingly bear with one another."

Now some of the additional occurrences of this language in the New Testament shed light on the face of forbearance, bring to our view the features of this necessary grace, and

along with that I should add, bring to our mind something of the focus of this grace that we'll not come to expressly until tonight but I want to run through a few of these other usages beyond our primary text. In the context, and now we're going to Matthew 17, in the context of the demon possessed boy brought to Jesus' disciples by the father and you'll recall the disciples failed to deliver, they failed to effectively meet the needs of that demon possessed boy, they failed to deliver him from bondage, Jesus expressed his own "putting up with." What did he put up with as we'll see in a moment? The littleness of their faith. Their weakness. Their weakness of faith. The littleness of the faith of his 12.

We find that in Matthew 17:17 and the parallels, Mark 9:19 and Luke 9:41. To put the picture together, our Lord, Matthew 10:1, expressly gave the 12 "authority over unclean spirits to cast them out." Beyond that authority, he had commissioned them to heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, cast out demons. In the instance here of Matthew 17, a desperate father brings to our Lord his demon possessed son whom previously had been brought to the disciples. Quoting from the text, "I brought him to Your disciples and they could not cure him." Jesus, prior to exorcising the demon, responds with questions expressive of what forbearance is. He responded, "How long," or excuse me, how long must he put up with, and let me quote the text as I'm actually quoting my own interpretation of it. Matthew 17:17, "O unbelieving and perverted generation, how long shall I be with you? How long?" And now here's our term, "How long shall I put up with you? Bring him here to Me." How long must I put up with the weaknesses and the failures of those, in this case his 12, who should not be failing at this point as they had failed? They had been taught, they had been equipped, they had been commissioned by the one who was a perfect example of truth and power and yet they fell on their faces. What does our Lord do? He does not cut them off and send them away. He puts up with it. He forbears them. They failed to accomplish, they failed to perform, they failed to act like apostles, they fell down on the job, they were, we might say, derelict in their duty, they knew better, they could have done better but they didn't. They were men of little faith. Again, what does our Lord do? He doesn't send them home. He forbears them and that's bound up in the question, "How long shall I put up with you?"

Forbearance among other foci has reference to these kinds of things. Slowness to understand. We deal with people in our own areas of specialty or expertise, we deal with people in the church who seem to maintain notwithstanding the light they've had, the training they've had, the same confusion, ask the same questions, have the same wrong answers chronically or experiencing the same problems as a consequence. What do we do with those people? We do with them what Jesus did with his 12, we graciously tolerate, we patiently forbear those who are slow to respond, those like the 12 here whose progress seems so limited. Others here understand, promptly respond, while some here seemingly understand but if they're making progress it's at a snail's pace. What do we do with those people? We do with them what Jesus did with his 12, we put up with them. Others are having to put up with us, be reminded again. Those who are inconsistent, whose lives are marked by starts and stops, sudden bursts, encouraging bursts of obedience, vigorous efforts to make progress in the Christian life, and then two days later they're right back where they started. We show forbearance, those with patterns of irresponsibility, negligence. How often in one way or another we in the church demonstrate conduct,

ways that at least is akin in principle to that demonstrated by the 12 here in the narrative of Matthew 17 and that conduct in the church, among other responses, there may be other responses and we'll see tonight forbearance does not preclude correction, and there are times where it doesn't preclude even disenfranchising someone from a post of responsibility, but it does preclude this: it precludes a hasty, angry, cutting off of that one. That one who is weak. That one who is slow. That one who aggravates, vexes and irritates.

Beyond the Matthew 17:17 text, I turn now to Acts 18 and this is an instructive instance that, again, helps us to see the face of forbearance. Acts 18:12, "But while Gallio was proconsul," governor, "of Achaia," that's southern Greece, "the Jews with one accord rose up against Paul and brought him before the judgment seat, saying, 'This man persuades men to worship God contrary to the law.' But when Paul was about to open his mouth, Gallio said to the Jews, 'If it were a matter of wrong or of vicious crime, O Jews, it would be reasonable for me," here's our verb, "to put up with you." Now exegeting a bit of the white space there, I get the sense Gallio could have cared less about their complaint, even if it had been in the realm he identifies. He wasn't concerned. He wasn't interested, but he would have put up with it. "But if there are questions about words and names and your own law, look after it yourselves." The point is Gallio would put up with the complaints of these Jews, however petty, however insignificant he considered them to be, if they were related to "a matter of wrong or a vicious crime." Were it a case for his jurisdiction, in the language of the text, verse 14, "it would be reasonable for me to put up with you and your problems with this man, however uninterested I am." The potential forbearance here has reference to the Jews with their complaints, their problems, that we don't, that Gallio didn't want to have anything to do with.

You have someone come to you with a problem that they think is an emergency. It's seldom the case that someone else's problem is your emergency, though they may present it as such, but what do you do? Well, among other responses, one thing you do if you're in Christ is you graciously tolerate it. Now you may correct, you may instruct, but you don't amputate them from the body. You put up with it. That's life in the church. You get that phone call when you sit down to eat and someone on the other end thoughtlessly goes on with their conversation. Well, there may come a point where you inform them, "We just sat down to eat, could I call you back or could you call me back?" That may be wise and that may be polite and appropriate, but what you don't do is slam the phone down and hang up. You forbear.

2 Corinthians 11:1, Paul says, "I wish that you would," and now here's our term again, "I wish that you would bear with me," put up with me, "in a little foolishness." Now he's writing that, we must understand, kind of tongue-in-cheek. It's not full-blown foolishness, it's gonna be the foolishness of boasting, but again it's a qualified boasting; he's trying to defend his apostolic ministry essential to defending the Gospel in Corinth. That being said, "I wish that you would bear with me in a little foolishness; but indeed you are bearing with me." Well, my point here is the connection between putting up with and the foolishness of others.

Forbearance has reference to such a fate, to such a kind of conduct: the poor judgment of a brother whose poor decisions, foolish decisions draw you into their consequences either by taking up your time or maybe some measure of your resources, hasty decisions that entangle you in the outcomes; the foolishness of coming to you for counsel again and again and there's a track record of having done so but having walked away and completely ignored it. What do you do with that person? Well, among other things, you show forbearance. Now again, you may correct it and you may show them the path of foolishness in the past, but you don't cut them off from the body. You show forbearance to them in love.

Financial foolishness, another example. Once again a given brother or sister has handled money as if there's no tomorrow, spending extravagantly and impulsively to feed covetousness and their pleasures and now they come tapping on your shoulder for help again. Now you may not help them because you may be found subsidizing their extravagance but, again, you don't slam the door in their face. You show forbearance. Forbearance with such foolish and childish conduct, conduct that admittedly is unbecoming to a Christian and an adult, but in the church we don't throw them out the door, lock the door, and forbid them back. We want them back. We forbear with one another.

In 2 Thessalonians 1:4 the term occurs again, "we ourselves speak proudly of you among the churches of God for your perseverance and faith in the midst of all your persecutions and afflictions which you endure." There's our term. It could be rendered "put up with," it could be rendered "forbear," a connection there, the point is as we try to understand what forbearance is, between forbearance and the difficulties and trials that others inflict upon us, and the reality is that life in the church will be characterized by troubles and afflictions inflicted upon us not only by those outside of the church, but in my own judgment by far the most painful are those inflicted by those inside the church. Again, the point here is the connection between these troubles and trials and harassments and putting up with.

2 Timothy 4:3, "For the time will come when they will not," put up with, "endure," there's our term, forbear, "sound doctrine." Hebrews 13:22, "I urge you, brethren, bear with this word of exhortation." Put up with the public ministry of the word of God. It may be that it is delivered with an accent that irritates you; with gestures that annoy you; with volume that you'd like to turn down. It may come with a length that you wish could be changed, vocabulary that perhaps you wish was simpler. You may have to put up with a manner and style of the word of exhortation that because of certain things in you, just bug you. I understand that. I'll also add sometimes I get bugged from this side. We bug each other. What do we do? We don't turn off the lights and go home, we forbear with one another. You forbear with me, I have to forbear with a few things I see going on fairly regularly.

The evident reality is that in the church constituted of diverse humanity, constituted of imperfectly renewed humans who still have remaining sin, the reality is that in such a church if there's gonna be frequent and meaningful interaction with one another, there are

going to arise all sorts of things that we must graciously, patiently tolerate. If that's not gonna be the case, we can't be a church. It's that simple. Member to member, there will be perceived irritating habits of all sorts, ignorance in certain areas that one of us considers inexcusable, "How come they can't figure that out?" Incompetents, "They should be able but plainly they're not." Mannerisms, peculiar ways, quirks of temperament and personality. How do we respond? Showing forbearance to one another in love. This is something of the face of forbearance, what it looks like, patiently, graciously putting up with instead of writing off and casting out.

In the language of a few others to wrap up this matter of the face of forbearance, to endure, to bear with, to put up with someone, in the language of my professor, the man who is forbearing is able to make allowances for the faults of his fellow believers, to bear with them in their weaknesses and failings. Martyn Lloyd-Jones writes and I quote, "The putting up with, bearing and enduring, bearing with, trying to understand them, a person may be irritable because he has been having a very trying time or he might not be well physically, perhaps he's not had advantages and opportunities in life like you have. Perhaps his brain power is not what it ought to be. Do not merely try to score over him, do not strike him, do not dismiss him, do not be contemptuous of him, do not be impatient with him. We must be patient with one another. We must be forbearing, longsuffering."

Finally, brethren, in this hour, going back to our text in Ephesians 4:2 showing forbearance, we've considered something of the meaning, the features of this necessary "one another" duty, this Christ-like grace. I add further showing forbearance, present tense. That tells us as to another feature, this is always gonna be applicable. Continual action. As long as there is humanity with its vast array of differences of every sort, as long as we live together in the church, as long as we endeavor to effectively relate to people in society or in the house of God, essential to usefulness is forbearing with each other. Relationships of all sorts, marital, parental, neighborly, employment relations, but here the church necessitate not just a display here or there of forbearance but of a continuing spirit of forbearance, Philippians 4:4, "Let your forbearing spirit be known to all men." The alternative is to demand that everyone please you, be just like you. That's not gonna happen. The other alternative is isolation because the former will never happen, and church life is not isolated.

Present tense, emphasizing we always stand in need of forbearing with one another. Middle voice emphasizes that we choose to do this, portraying the subject as deliberately acting, deliberately choosing to bear up and put up with, choosing, the choice each of us must make if we're to be a Christ-like church and have in reality effective, functioning, cooperative relationships. The participle tells us, as it does in Colossians 3:13, that this forbearance is connected to something else, not only patience, the underlying grace, but there's another outworking, it's forgiveness and the matter of putting up with one another morphs from matters that simply bug us to matters that are actually offenses. Yes, we put up with those but we also have to exercise the grace of forgiveness.

Well, brethren, this is the face of forbearance and if we're gonna be a church amidst our diverse backgrounds, our diverse employments, the influences out there in the world in which we're exposed, the things that arise from our temperament, our personalities, our rearing in the past, well, they're gonna be differences and they're gonna be eccentricities and they're gonna be peculiarities. What do we do when those things arise? We show forbearance to one another, we make allowances for one another because we love one another. Showing forbearance to one another in love is critically necessary to life in the church.

Well, God willing tonight we'll take up with the matter of the fundamentals, these underlying graces, connected graces, patience and love, the matter of the focus of forbearance that has already been largely suggested under the first heading, and finally the finale where this all heads, it heads to guarding the unity of the church.

Now let us pray with dependence upon the one who has had to put up with us, that is the Lord Jesus.

Father, as we leave here this afternoon, may we repent of those times where we have been small-hearted and narrow, responding in anger, responding in exasperation when others have annoyed us, when others have agitated and provoked us. Father, may we be a church that exercises the Spirit-wrought and Christ-like putting up with of forbearance, the gracious, patient tolerance of one's weaknesses and faults and eccentricities. And Father, may we leave here examining ourselves also in the way that we may be annoying others with some measure of self-awareness that we do not try the patience of others. And Father, thank You that in our rebellion and even now in our slowness and in our littleness of faith, the God-man as with His 12, has put up with us. Father, may that be the model for us putting up with one another. I pray in the name of Christ. Amen.